

## **IRC 2014 INTERVIEW Mike Durbridge, B&Q, on bringing digital into its stores**

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Ahead of this year's Internet Retailing Conference (IRC 2014), we're running a series of interviews in which we hear from some of the industry leaders taking part in this year's event. Today we talk to Mike Durbridge, omnichannel director at B&Q about why and how it is taking digital into its stores.



**Internet Retailing: At IRC 2014, you're speaking about B&Q's move to bring digital into the store. Who are B&Q's customers and how can digital help them in their journey through the store?**

Mike Durbridge, omnichannel director, B&Q: With a retailer the size of B&Q we have a very broad audience of customers, typically ranging from 30 to 60 years old. We have a broad mix of demographic and gender types so really it's not so much about trying to hit a particular customer segment as much as it's about how do you make home improvement easier for our customers and for the UK? Home improvement is not easy – not just in doing it, but in deciding what to do and what to get in order to do that. Digital can play a massive role in making our customers' lives so much simpler, and easier, helping them to do the things they want to do.

**Internet Retailing: What's your favourite example of that in action?**

Mike Durbridge: I've got a couple. Among the challenges our customers face today is that they don't really know where to start. If you wanted to get a new kitchen would you know exactly what you wanted to do, what sort of style, how to change what you wanted from today? The kitchen design digital tool we're bringing into the store is one with which the customer, from scratch, look at different room sets, get an idea of what they'd like to achieve, then start playing around with that room set based on the dimensions of their kitchen. In real time they can drag and drop different elements – maybe adding an island to the kitchen. At the same time the tool works out how much it would cost for that style of kitchen. If it's too expensive or the customer doesn't want it, they just drag it out and put something else in instead. It's a really quick tool that helps customers from the start, where they're not really sure what they want, through the design process to finding out how much it would cost in about 10-15 minutes, something that would normally take a few days. The customer can then access all of that information from home, using the power of the internet. They can change the design, the colour and the image, and the pricing updates so they know exactly how much it will cost. They can communicate interactively and remotely with the person that designed their kitchen to say I'll book dates or what do you think and there's a two-way dialogue through to it being installed. It's a helpful and collaborative way of helping customers make perhaps one of the biggest decisions they'll make in their lives.



My second example is wi-fi. By the end of this year all the B&Q stores will have wifi in them. That makes it so much easier for customers to use all the digital assets we're creating. Free of charge, it'll be in any of our stores to make it really helpful to have this digital, helpful friend that's always with you on your smartphone that you can access wherever you want, and that helps you at all the points of your journey in the physical store.

**Internet Retailing: What's your ultimate ambition for B&Q's omnichannel strategy?**

Mike Durbridge: My vision is around asking how I can make home improvement simple, quicker and how I can make B&Q the helpful place for home improvements. If I can do that, I'm going to engender loyalty, repeat visits and purchases from that customer base. It's all about being simple, quick and helpful and all of that is wrapped in a digital framework, and how you bring that to life in a digital store. It's particularly about how you join it up – most customers will start online, do their research and then go to a physical store to touch, feel and try. It's important I have that consistency of customer journey, making it really simple, quick and helpful at every step of the way.

**Internet Retailing: Can you share one key challenge and the one key benefit that you've encountered on the journey of taking B&Q towards omnichannel?**

Mike Durbridge: When you articulate a vision of we want to be simple, quick and helpful and this is what it means for all the different areas of the business, it's amazing how quickly everyone agrees and gets aligned in making that happen. The really big benefit is getting alignment around a common vision that gives the clarity that they need in order to tackle and make that vision come to life. I guess it's a surprising benefit because it's not a strategy but an alignment of tools and business departments that brings together different sides of our business. As a really big business, we've benefitted across the business with those metaphorical Chinese walls coming down.

The biggest challenge is one we face every day. To try and create simplicity you have to tread through the most complex world of breaking down all the legacy technology, and processes, and ways of thinking, to break that back into: 'What does the customer want?' and 'How do you make that as simple as it can possibly be?' That is so complicated.

**Internet Retailing: Beyond your own presentation, what are you most looking forward to at IRC 2014?**

Mike Durbridge: I guess there's two things. Whenever I'm at anything to do with Internet Retailing, whether it's IRC or IRX, I'm always looking for two things: what can I learn that's best practice from other retailers that I can take on board for some quick wins? That's about finding fantastic ideas that we could do really quickly, and I almost come away with a list of quick wins and actions to start taking immediately. That's balanced with thought-provoking debate and presentations from other companies looking at future challenges and the future priorities of customers over the next 12 to 36 months. That really helps me either reinforce the strategy I've got in place or start to challenge elements of that. Those are the two things I'm looking for: Have I got the future strategy right, and what are the quick wins for best practice?

Mike Durbridge is speaking in the Time track at IRC 2014. His presentation, Maximising the customer experience by synchronising digital and physical worlds, will be at 11.55 in track two of the event, which takes place on October 14 at the Novotel, Hammersmith, London.



Link: <http://internetretailing.net/2014/09/irc-2014-interview-mike-durbridge-bq-on-bringing-digital-into-its-stores/>